THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (c) India and the United States are engaged in intensive and broad based dialogue at the political and official levels to pursue the goal of transforming bilateral relations, which was outlined by Prime Minister and President Bush in Washington D.C. in November, 2001.

The two sides have expanded their bilateral dialogue architecture, expanded political consultations and agreed to advance mutually beneficial cooperation in a number of areas, including trade, investment, energy, environment, health, science and technology, defence, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, law enforcement, cyber security, civilian space applications, safety related issues in civilian nuclear field and high technology cooperation, including in the areas of 'dual use' goods and technologies, information technology, biotechnology, nano-technology and defence technology.

These initiatives will contribute towards India's economic development, strengthening its security and advancing its scientific capabilities.

Resumption of Air Links with Pakistan

508. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal to resume civil aviation links with Pakistan and where do the tech-level talks stand between the two countries; and

(b) the detail of steps taken by Government to resume Lahore bus link and other pending matters between the two countries to give peace a chance?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Prime Minister, in his statement in Parliament on May 2, 2003 offered the resumption of civil aviation links with Pakistan on reciprocal basis. Pakistan Prime Minister, in his statement on May 6, responded partially to this proposal, without indicating clearly the approach to over flights. As resumption of civil

aviation links would include direct air services and over flights, a specific confirmation in this regard was sought from Pakistan. Pakistan indicated that the issue could be discussed further at technical level between the civil aviation authorities of the two sides. On June 24, 2003 India conveyed its readiness for early convening of technical level discussions for resumption of civil aviation on reciprocal basis. Pakistan on July 16, 2003, announced that it is willing to host the talks. Proposals for specific dates for the meeting are awaited from Pakistan.

(b) Prime Minister had, on April 18, 2003, extended once again the hand of friendship to Pakistan. In his telephone conversation with Pakistan's Prime Minister on April 28, 2003, Prime Minister had emphasized the importance of economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, people-to-people contacts and civil aviation links for creating a climate conducive to addressing more difficult issues. In this context, Government had on May 26, 2003, approved the resumption of Delhi-Lahore bus service as soon as the details were worked out by the technical authorities of the two countries. A technical team from Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation visited India and a technical level meeting was held between the two countries on June 19-20, 2003 in New Delhi. Subsequently, the bus resumed service from July 11, 2003.

India is committed to resolving all outstanding issues with Pakistan through bilateral dialogue and peaceful means in the spirit of Shimla Agreement and Lahore Declaration. Government intends to proceed with present approach of step by step normalization of diplomatic and other links. Further steps would be considered based on progress made, and creation of conducive atmosphere for sustained dialogue necessarily required an end to cross border infiltration and dismantling of the infrastructure of support to terrorism in Pakistan.

Statement of Chinese Ambassador on PM's visit

509. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that as per the recent statement of the Chinese Ambassador to India, the visit of Indian Prime Minister has yielded better than expected results that would go a long way to enhance the mutual trust and understanding between India and China and lead to a final settlement of the historical problem between the two countries; and